

# Syllabus

MEJO 141.005 | Media Ethics | Spring 2019



UNC  
SCHOOL OF MEDIA  
AND JOURNALISM

Course Details	Mondays and Wednesdays, 2-3:15 p.m.   Carroll Hall, Room 143
Instructor	Deborah Dwyer   ddwyer@live.unc.edu   423.994.2840
Office & Hours	Carroll Hall 367   Mondays and Wednesdays, 12–1:45 p.m. or by appointment

## Welcome to the fascinating and challenging world of media ethics!

We're here to learn about ethics in the mass media. Media professionals talk a lot about doing the right thing, but they're often criticized for ethical and moral shortcomings. In this class, we will discuss the ethical dilemmas that confront professionals in **print** and **broadcast journalism, visual communication** (photojournalism and graphic design), and **strategic communication** (PR, advertising, and other business communication). We will examine codes of ethics for various media professions and evaluate how these guidelines have and have not been applied in specific settings.

This class explores what constitutes ethical practices, what interferes with ethical practices, and what emerging ethical issues may challenge you as the future leaders of the media and journalism fields. In the end, you should be familiar with the tools needed to make professional ethical decisions in an organized and informed way.

Rather than a course that focuses solely on your retention of specific information, "learning" ethics means adding *critical thinking* and *applied reasoning* to your skills toolbox so you can use them to navigate an unlimited number of challenges you might face during your career.

You'll get out of this course what you put into it. Your success will depend upon your willingness to keep up with the readings, participate in class and on Sakai, and keep an open mind when dealing with issues and others' opinions. So come to class prepared and ready to participate in informed discussions!

### Text/Readings

The required text for this course is *Media Ethics: Issues & Cases* (8th edition) by Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins. The text will be supplemented by online readings. All assigned readings should be completed before the appropriate class sessions for which they are assigned to ensure that you're ready to discuss, ask questions, offer opinions, disagree, argue, and share knowledge.

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## Prerequisites

None! This class is required for MEJO/JOMC majors, and it meets a requirement for a minor in social and economic justice. MEJO 141 also meets the philosophical and moral reasoning (PH) requirement of General Education. That means that during the course of this semester, each student must complete at least 10 pages of writing. Your cumulative assignments meet this requirement.

## Course Goals

1. Integrate ethical foundations and apply those ideas to professional situations
2. Critically analyze current media professional practices through reading and discussing communication topics found in trade journals and other media
3. Compare ethical standards of mass communication professions and examine how similarities and differences help or hinder their professional relationships
4. Develop, defend, and apply your own set of guidelines to tackle ethical situations

## Professional Values and Competencies

The School of Media and Journalism's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here:

<http://bit.ly/2b2FoBB>. No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. The values and competencies below are most relevant for this course:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity
- Think critically, creatively and independently

## About the Content

This course may at times include topics, materials, and discussions that could be disturbing or distressing to some people. It is difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate all the directions our conversations may take. If you find it necessary to step out of the classroom, you may do so without penalty. However, you are

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responsible for any material covered during time that you miss, and you should make arrangements to get an update from a classmate.

The university provides a number of resources and services to help you cope with any difficult challenges you face while part of the Carolina community and beyond through Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS):

<https://campushealth.unc.edu/services/counseling-andpsychological-services>.

### Basic Guidelines

- Be on time. This is a basic issue of professionalism, responsibility, and mutual respect (all huge themes of this course). Getting dinged for violating this expectation is one of the best ways to ensure you learn the importance of this before entering the professional world. Seriously.
- Be respectful. Participation and discussion are key to this course. We need to hear what everyone has to say, and we may we have some intense discussions. Keep in mind that we don't all have to agree, but we do have to be respectful in our disagreement.
- Be open minded. This course isn't about what you naturally "think" or "feel" about things; it's about applying new knowledge gained in the class to address the real-world ethical issues we discuss. Try to keep your personal feelings in check and instead rely on informed reasoning and the professional guidelines you will learn. A great way to learn this skill is to take a stab at arguing against your initial reaction! That said, don't worry about pauses in conversation; it's more important to reason through your responses.
- No phones, no social media, and no browsing. Please turn off the ringer and put away your phone before class begins. You may use your laptops for taking notes and periodic class exercises only. There may be times when you will be asked to put your laptop away to facilitate discussions. If I see an issue with the use of laptops, we will revisit the use of them during class time.
- Communication is key. Many misunderstandings, issues, problems, and unnecessary situations (crisis communications folks can come up with all sorts of names for it) can be solved by open communication. If I don't know there is a problem, I can't help to solve it. If you have an issue I need to be aware of, talk to me sooner rather than later. Knowing well in advance about the issue equates to more options from which to identify a solution.

### Assignments & Course Requirements

Please note that late assignments are not accepted without my prior approval.

#### Attendance

You are permitted three absences from class without penalty. If you are late to class by more than 15 minutes or leave more than 15 minutes early, you will be counted absent. You do not have to notify the instructor of your reasons for your absences, nor do you have to provide a doctor's note. For each class you miss after three, your final grade will be lowered by three points. For example, if your course

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grade average is a B- (81) and you have four absences, your final grade will be a C+ (78). Please note: Chances are good that you will need all of your absences for sick days or other types of emergencies or opportunities. I suggest you save your absences for these purposes.

### Participation

More than many other college courses, the success of this class depends in large part on the quality of class discussion. Quality discussion depends in large part on students coming to class prepared. Protect your participation grade! Here's how:

- **Starting the Conversation:** Once each week, you must submit a Sakai post of 2-3 paragraphs (about 100-150 words) about the readings for the next class session. You can choose to submit your post for Monday's class or Wednesday's class each week as long as your post is submitted by noon on the class day. Your post should include two questions for class discussion. Each post is worth 10 points.
- **Pay attention.** Effective classroom discussion depends on active listening. Disengaged students are those talking to their neighbor while someone else is speaking to the class, reading or viewing material not related to the class discussion or activity, sleeping in class, having a computer open during Ethics in the News presentations, or generally being disruptive in a way that prohibits a good learning environment.
- **Fully engage in discussion.** Engagement in class is critical in this course because you are learning a reasoning process, not just basic facts or knowledge you can glean from a book. Speaking in class helps build your reasoning skills. Verbally reasoning through ethical issues is great practice that will prepare you well for your midterm and final.

This is a big class, and it is important that we hear from as many voices as possible during our sessions. That said, please be mindful to balance speaking in class with actively listening to your fellow students.

### Writing Exercise

You will have one writing assignment in which you will analyze an ethical issue based on class readings. I will provide details in class and on Sakai, including a grading rubric. Each should be no fewer than 1,000 and no more than 1,200 words. Late papers will not be accepted.

### Ethics in the News Project (sign up dates will be posted on Sakai)

You will work in teams of 3-4 students to identify and analyze a media ethics item recently in the news. The assignment consists of a substantial Sakai post and an 5-7-minute presentation in class, including leading the class discussion. This is a good way to begin "flexing" your critical thinking and applied reasoning skills in response to real-world challenges faced by mass media professionals.

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Each group member will receive the same grade for the assignment unless a member does not show for the presentation or is demonstrating a clear lack of participation in the project. Detailed instructions for this assignment and a grading rubric will be posted on Sakai.

### Midterm and Final Exams

Two exams will test your understanding of the material covered in lectures, assigned readings, and class presentations. Exams will include multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, and short answer/brief essay questions. The final exam will test your knowledge of the material from the entire semester. Exams may only be made up in the event of an actual medical emergency (with proof from a doctor's note). Please note that you will need to bring your laptop to class for the exams. More details about the exam will be provided in class.

### Research Participation Requirement

Students in MEJO 141-004 are required to complete two hours of research over the course of the semester. There are two ways to fulfill this requirement. The first way is to participate in two hours of academic research studies in the School of Media and Journalism. You will receive emails about these opportunities; sign up online to participate. Double-dipping is allowed if this requirement is present in another class! The second way to fulfill the research participation requirement is to write two two-page summaries and/or critiques of academic research articles from either of the last two issues of the Journal of Media Ethics. Each review counts for one hour of research participation, so you may combine participation in the studies with article reviews to fulfill the research requirement. You may not "double dip" on this assignment, meaning that you may not turn in a paper for this class and any other. The summary should include your personal and frank reaction to the article and can be written in any tone that you chose. Get some guidance here: <http://guides.lib.unc.edu/mejo141>. Your summaries are due no later than noon on Wednesday, April 24. Early papers are cheerfully accepted!

### **Final Grade Calculation**

• Final exam	25%	<u>Grading Scale</u> A = 93 - 100 A- = 90 - 92.9 B+ = 87 - 89.9 B = 83 - 86.9 B- = 80 - 82.9 C+ = 77 - 79.9 C = 73 - 76.9 C- = 70 - 72.9 D+ = 67 - 69.9 D = 60 - 66.9 F = <60
• Writing assignment	15%	
• Ethics in the News presentation	15%	
• Midterm exam	25%	
• Engagement (Sakai posts, in-class participation)	15%	
• Research participation	5%	

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In order to earn a letter grade, you must fully earn that percentage. Grades are not rounded up or down. So, to receive a final course grade of A-, you must earn at least a 90 percent. A final average of 89.7 is a B+.

Although grades are not negotiable, I will give consideration if a legitimate concern arises about an assignment grade. However, you must wait 24 hours after receiving the grade to connect with me. Any actions to address a grade question/dispute must be resolved within a week of receiving that grade or the grade stands.

I follow the University's Grading Standards adopted by the Faculty Council. *More specifics from me are in italics.*

- A: Mastery of course content at the highest level of attainment that can reasonably be expected of students at a given stage of development. The "A" grade states clearly that the student has shown such outstanding promise in the aspect of the discipline under study that he/she may be strongly encouraged to continue. *Clear and original thinking, thorough analysis, logical assertions supported by significant amounts of evidence, clear writing that is concise and grammatically correct, and strong organization. Very strong class participation.*
- B: Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The "B" grade states that the student has shown solid promise in the aspect of the discipline under study. *Clear and original thinking, relatively thorough analysis, logical assertions supported by some amount of evidence, clear writing with very few grammatical errors, and good organization. Strong class participation.*
- C: A totally acceptable performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The "C" grade states that, while not yet showing any unusual promise, the student may continue to study in the discipline with reasonable hope of intellectual development. *One or two elements of the assignment may be weak or missing, some writing errors, some weakness in organization, and relatively little evidence for assertions. Adequate class participation.*
- D: A marginal performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The "D" grade states that the student has given no evidence of prospective growth in the disciplines; an accumulation of D grades should be taken to mean that the student would be well advised not to continue in the academic field. *Several elements of the assignment are weak or missing, poor writing, poor organization, lack of evidence for assertions. Low class participation.*
- F: For whatever reason, an unacceptable performance. The "F" grade indicates that the student's performance in the required exercises has revealed almost no understanding of the course content. A grade of F should warrant an adviser's

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questioning whether the student may suitably register for further study in the discipline before remedial work is undertaken. *Most or all of the required elements are missing, the assignment is turned in late, and writing is so bad that it's difficult to understand. Very low or no class participation.*

### Sakai Course Site

Course information, including this syllabus, and other resources are available on the course's Sakai site. As a student registered in this course, you have automatic access to this site and are expected to use it for this class. We will go over the site's basic features in class.

Forums: This will be the place to post your Starting the Conversation and Ethics in the News posts. All postings must adhere to University policies and standards. Please be respectful of all opinions, whether you agree with them or not.

Resources: PowerPoints and supplemental readings are posted in this section. Taking notes in the notes section of the PowerPoint (many of my PPs have notes as well) is a great way to keep all your content for tests in one place.

Assignments: Details about your assignments are posted in this section. This is where you submit your assignments as well.

Gradebook and Attendance: You can see your grades and your attendance record under these sections at any time.

### Honor Code

All participants in this course are expected to conduct themselves within the guidelines of the [University Honor System](#). All academic work should be completed with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. All participants in this course are expected to complete their own work and there will be no leniency for cheating. Anyone in this course who has concerns about the Honor Code or the role it plays in this course are encouraged to meet with the instructor, Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Students Charlie Tuggle, or a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

### Diversity

The University's policy statements on Equal Employment Opportunity and Nondiscrimination are outlined at <http://policy.sites.unc.edu/files/2013/04/nondiscrim.pdf>. In summary, UNC does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Why is this important? We will explore it in this course.

### Harassment

UNC does not tolerate harassment based on gender, race, religion, sexual

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orientation, culture, disability, or for any other reason. It is also a violation of the Honor Code and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and Title IX of the Educational Amendments. If you need assistance with a harassment issue or problem, bring it to the attention of the instructor or The Office of the Dean of Students, [dos@unc.edu](mailto:dos@unc.edu) or (919) 966-4042.

### Accreditation

The UNC Chapel Hill School of Media and Journalism's accrediting body outlines a number of professional values and competencies students should be able to demonstrate by the time they graduate. This course touches on a number of the values and competencies, with an emphasis on (1) demonstrating an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity; and (2) thinking critically, creatively and independently. Complete accreditation standards are available at <https://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/STANDARDS.SHTML#std2>.

### Individual Accommodations

If you require individual accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please contact the instructor as soon as possible. For more information, visit the Learning Center website at <http://learningcenter.unc.edu/ldahd-services/> or call (919) 962-3782.

## Course Schedule

(Subject to change as needed)

Date	Topic
Wed. Jan. 9	First class with Dr. Aikat
Jan. 14 & 16	Guest speakers
Jan. 21 & 23	MLK Holiday New instructor intro, syllabus review, & what are ethics?
Jan. 28 & 30	Moral Reasoning The Philosophers
Feb. 4 & 6	The Philosophers Ethical Decision-making Tools
Feb. 11 & 13	Journalism Ethics
Feb. 18 & 20	Ethical Practices & Sensitive Subjects
Feb. 25 & 27	Movie: Nobody Speak
March 4 & 6	Nobody Speak/Catch-up/Midterm Review Midterm Exam
March 11 & 13	NO CLASS — Spring break
March 18 & 20	Guest speaker

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	Big Data & Privacy
March 25 & 27	Visual Communication
April 1 & 3	Advertising
April 8 & 10	Public Relations Writing Assignment Due 4/10
April 15 & 17	Corporate Communications
April 22 & 24	Catch-up day Exam Review
May 1	NO CLASS — Reading Day

**FINAL EXAM: Tuesday, May 7, 4-6 p.m.**